

# **Cultural status inequalities: an important dimension of group mobilization**

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CRISE WORKING PAPER No. 41  
August, 2007



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### *Abstract*

Recent research on the causes of violent conflicts has focused predominantly on political and economic grievances, motivations and issues. However, in many conflicts, political and economic issues are accompanied by perceptions of cultural discrimination, exclusion or inequality of treatment. In this paper, we analyze the relationship between culture and conflict within the broader framework of horizontal inequalities – that is, inequalities between culturally defined groups. We argue that an important link between culture and group mobilization, including violent conflict, is the extent to which cultural groups' practices and customs are *differentially recognized in and by the state*. Differences in the status afforded to different cultures by the state, whether implicitly or explicitly, and popular perceptions of and anxieties over differences in cultural status thus constitute a third dimension of horizontal inequalities, in addition to the political and socioeconomic dimensions, which we term cultural status inequalities. Moreover, we argue that the most dangerous situations exist where all three dimensions of horizontal inequality – socioeconomic, political and cultural status – run in the same direction, or are consistent.

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**Table of Contents**

1. Introduction ..... 3

2. Conceptualizing cultural status inequalities ..... 4

3. Three aspects of cultural status inequality ..... 7

    3.1 Recognition of religious practices and observances ..... 7

    3.2 Language and language recognition ..... 8

    3.3 Recognition of ethnocultural practices ..... 8

4. Status anxiety: Linking cultural status inequalities, mobilization and conflict ..... 11

5. Conclusions ..... 12

6. References ..... 13

**List of Tables**

Table 1. Dimensions of cultural status inequality ..... 10

## **Cultural status inequalities: an important dimension of group mobilization**

**By Arnim Langer and Graham K. Brown**

### **1. Introduction**

Recent research on the causes of civil wars and communal, ethnic or religious conflicts has focused predominantly on political and economic grievances, motivations and issues (e.g. Collier and Hoeffler 2004; Fearon and Laitin 2003; Nafziger and Auvinen 2000; Stewart 2000; Stewart 2002). However, in many conflicts, political and economic issues are complemented by perceptions of cultural discrimination, exclusion or inequality of treatment. As Horowitz (Horowitz 2002: 22) asserts in this respect: cultural matters, “such as the designation of official languages and official religions, and educational issues, such as languages of instruction, the content of curricula, and the official recognition of degrees from various educational streams associated with various ethnic or religious groups”, and freedom of cultural expression more generally, often play a central role in the emergence of violent conflicts.

What, then, is the role of culture in violent conflict? On one side stand scholars who see cultural matters primarily as potential flashpoints for violence, or what Horowitz (2001) terms a ‘precipitant’. For these scholars, culture is often something manipulated by those with a vested interest in violence or conflict. Paul Brass, for instance, emphasizes this dimension in his account of the ‘production’ of Hindu-Muslim violence in India, epitomized by his well-known refrain of ‘the theft of an idol’ (Brass 1997; Brass 2003). This is not to say that Brass does not accept the importance of culture to people’s lives and sense of self; but he sees its role in conflict as primarily instrumental.

On the other side is Samuel Huntington’s hypothesis of the ‘clash of civilizations’, which emphasizes cultural difference as the root of conflict in the post-Cold War era: “the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural” (Huntington 1993: p.22).

In this paper, we take a different view and analyze the relationship between culture and conflict within the broader framework of horizontal inequalities (HIs) – that is, inequalities between culturally defined groups (Stewart 2000; Stewart 2002). Culture, of course, plays a fundamental role in framing socioeconomic and political HIs generally since it is a common culture or identity which binds groups together. But in this paper we consider how the way different cultures are treated by the state (and others) itself forms an important HI, which can contribute to group mobilization, independently of political or socioeconomic HIs. We argue that an important link between culture and group mobilization, including violent conflict, is the extent to which cultural groups’ practices and customs are differentially recognized in and by the state. Differences in the status afforded to different cultures by the state, whether implicitly or explicitly, and popular perceptions of and anxieties over differences in cultural status thus constitute a third dimension of horizontal inequalities, in addition to the political and socioeconomic dimensions, which we term cultural status inequalities. It is important here to distinguish this from broader concepts of state discrimination on the basis of culture, that is exclusion from access to socioeconomic or political assets on the basis of an individual’s cultural identity. Our concern here is more specifically with how the state in particular, but also state-related actors and

non-state actors such as the media, treat different groups' cultural norms and practices in themselves.

In this paper, we argue that the analysis of cultural status inequalities in plural societies is an important complement to political and economic analysis in understanding the emergence of (violent) group mobilization. The second section elucidates further the concept of cultural status inequality. The third section focuses on the three main aspects of cultural status – recognition of religion and religious observance; language rights and language recognition; and, recognition of ethnocultural practices. The final section analyzes more closely the link between cultural status inequality and (violent) group mobilization.

## **2. Conceptualizing cultural status inequalities**

We define cultural status inequalities as perceived or actual differences in the treatment, public recognition or status of different groups' cultural norms, practices, symbols and customs. This definition clearly covers a range of practices and intentionality on the part of the state in question. The most extreme form of cultural status inequality consists of the phenomenon, sometimes labelled 'cultural genocide' or 'ethnocide', whereby the state explicitly takes on the cultural garb of the dominant group and repudiates the expression of other cultural identities not only in the public sphere, but also the private sphere. For instance, until 1990, the Kurds in Turkey who numbered about 10 million were not allowed to use their own language. The official policy of the Turkish government was to deny their existence and to refer to them, if at all, as 'Mountain Turks' (Gurr 2000). The restrictions imposed on religious and cultural practices in Tibet by the Chinese government is another example of an attempt to deculturize a particular group. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-76), the Chinese government "destroyed nearly all Buddhist monasteries and religious symbols and outlawed all manifestations of Tibetan culture" (Khosla 2000: p.214). While restrictions on the practice of Buddhism were relaxed in the 1980s, they were tightened again from the mid-1990s. In 1994, for instance, the Chinese authorities banned the display of photographs of the Dalai Lama. In the same year, the Chinese government also denounced the Dalai Lama's choice of 'Panchen Lama', the second most senior religious position, and appointed its own successor (ibid). The 'Stolen Generation' of Aboriginal children forcibly resettled with white parents in Australia, is another example that demonstrates that such cultural genocide is not unique to undemocratic developing countries (van Krieken 1999).

Less extreme than cultural genocide are cases where one or more particular groups are afforded an explicitly lower status in society but the state does not seek to eradicate the culture altogether. When the democratic franchise is limited to certain cultural groups – what van den Berghe terms 'Herrenvolk democracy' – cultural status inequalities become virtually coterminous with political inequalities, in which some groups are treated "as disenfranchised subjects with separate and inferior status as slaves, pariahs or conquered nations" (van den Berghe 2002: p.437). South Africa during the Apartheid era and the pre-Civil War United States are obvious examples here. In such cases, not only is the cultural status of subordinated groups demeaned, but they are also denied the possibility of assimilation. This argument is well illustrated by the treatment of the Chinese in New Order Indonesia. Victims of some of the most blatant ethnic suppression, including the banning of Chinese names and Chinese characters, in the early years of the regime, the Chinese were held up by the New Order as a contaminating 'other' that threatened the authenticity of the nationalist project (Heryanto 1998: p.97; Rakindo 1975). Forever subject to assimilationist policies, they were thus denied the possibility of

assimilating fully – for instance, alone amongst Indonesian citizens, they were obliged to have their ethnicity marked on their identity cards – and thus remained ‘second-class’ citizens.

Cultural status inequality can also occur where the state is associated primarily although not exclusively with one cultural group. Nepal has historically privileged Hindu identity over others – the country’s first civil code, the 1854 Muluki Ain, went as far as ascribing a place in the Hindu caste hierarchy to non-Hindu groups (Höfer 1979) and, until the restoration of parliament in 2006 and the subsequent curtailing of the King’s power, Nepal was the world’s only officially Hindu state. In this respect, it is noteworthy that while the recent Maoist insurgency in Nepal sought to mobilize on the basis of caste exclusion, it was most successful in recruiting and mobilizing among the janajati ethnic minorities rather than the low-caste Hindus (Lecomte-Tilouine 2004; Schneiderman and Turin 2004).

In other cases, the state may not explicitly align itself with specific cultural groups but nonetheless affords them a *de facto* higher status. This is arguably the case with regard to most Western European countries, where immigrant groups are faced with a *de facto* white, Christian state. As Bikhu Parekh points out, where one group has historic cultural dominance or even exclusivity, a façade of cultural neutrality is often little more than the implicit privileging of the dominant culture:

“Since it [a state] necessarily needs some conception of the good life to structure its institutions and shape its laws and policies, it unwittingly adopts, institutionalizes and enforces the categories, practices, and values of the dominant culture. In so doing, it discriminates against other cultures, and creates a climate inhospitable to their flourishing or even survival.”

(Parekh 2004: p.201)

Thus far, we have discussed the varying degrees to which different states have given precedence to particular cultural groups, explicitly or implicitly. In contrast, other states have implemented a variety of measures and practices aimed at ensuring that the different cultural groups within a country are given equal visibility and recognition. An example of such neutrality is Belgium, where the constitution entails numerous checks and balances to ensure the equal treatment and recognition of the major ethnolinguistic groups’ languages and practices, in addition to a comprehensive set of rules and institutions aimed at maintaining political inclusivity and equality. For instance, all federal institutions are required to be equally accessible in any of the three official languages; parliamentarians at the federal level can address the assembly in each language; and the national anthem has a recognized version in all three languages. In addition to these more formal mechanisms, many informal and symbolic conventions and practices exist which reinforce and give public prominence to this constitutional equality, such as the convention whereby the prime minister employs the two major languages (Dutch/Flemish and French) in his addresses to parliament and the media.

In Ghana, most successive governments since that of the first president of the modern state, Kwame Nkrumah, have promoted cultural inclusiveness and status equality through a range of formal, informal and symbolic policies and practices. Thus, for instance, Nkrumah’s practice of alternating between suits, typically Ashanti *kente* cloths and northern smocks on public occasions was continued by most heads of state. Other measures, practices and customs that illustrate the culturally inclusive and neutral character of the Ghanaian state are, for example: the persistent refusal by consecutive Ghanaian governments to promote a particular local language

(especially that of the largest ethnic group, the Akan) as Ghana's national language; active state support for the study and teaching of Ghana's major local languages; the incorporation by institutions such as the Ghana Dance Ensemble of songs and dances from all major ethnic groups (Lentz and Nugent 2000); the conscious effort to broadcast radio and television programmes in all major languages (*ibid*); and the custom that representatives from the government attend the most important ethnic and/or traditional festivals throughout the country on a regular basis. Similarly, some (symbolic) actions and practices which demonstrate the commitment of the political elites to promoting and sustaining *religious* status equality and inclusiveness are, for instance: the practice that representatives from all major religions are present at official state functions; the state's active organizational support for the annual Hajj pilgrimage to the Muslim holy sites in Saudi Arabia; and the introduction of a new public holiday on the Muslim festival of *Eid-al-Adha* in 1996 (Langer, 2007).

However, official rhetoric of cultural inclusion may be used to mask other types of inequality – this is the 'dark side' of cultural status equality. In some cases, the official recognition of cultural status equality on the part of the state, combined with symbolic promotion of ethnic or religious diversity, has served as part of a political agenda to divert attention from underlying socioeconomic and political inequalities. Parekh (2004: p.202) makes a similar point when he notes that "the politics of recognition plays into the hands of the dominant class, which is all too happy to allow the Sikh his turban, the American Indians their peyote, the Muslims their *halal* meal, and so on, as long as the inequalities of wealth and power are left unchallenged". An indicative case here is again the New Order period in Indonesia, where a national motto of 'Unity in Diversity' was realized through national-level celebrations of cultural diversity. Cultural projects, such as the Taman Mini Indonesia Indah (Beautiful Indonesia in Miniature Park), "presented the acceptable limits of Indonesia's cultural difference" (Murray Li 2000: p.149; Pemberton 1994); museum curators became the 'modern day palace-poets' of Indonesia (Taylor 2003: p.343). All this celebration of diversity, however, was largely a mask for the political dominance of the Javanese, many of whose cultural practices were in fact used as the basis of institutions throughout the country. This phenomenon was epitomized by the 1979 Village Law, which reorganized village administrations uniformly across the country according to the Javanese *desa* system (Antlöv 2003).

The concept of cultural status inequality as elucidated here is clearly linked to ideas of multiculturalism and cultural discrimination, but also differs from these in important ways. The Minorities at Risk project defines groups to be subject to cultural discrimination if "their members are *restricted* in the pursuit of their cultural interests and expression of their customs and values" (Gurr 2000: p.118, emphasis added). According to Kymlicka (Kymlicka 2004: p.2), cultural exclusion "occurs when the culture of a group, including its language, religion, or traditional customs and lifestyles, is denigrated or suppressed by the state." Thus the presence of cultural discrimination and exclusion points to the existence of severe cultural status inequalities. But the absence of cultural discrimination and exclusion does not necessarily mean that there are no real or perceived differences in public visibility, recognition and status among different cultural groups and practices.

It is important to clarify how cultural status inequalities relate to other forms of horizontal inequality. Cultural status inequalities are likely to be associated with exclusion and inequality in the economic and political dimensions. Political and socioeconomic HIs themselves usually arise where there are cultural differences around which groups form. This in itself need not imply cultural status inequalities. However, often the presence of one form of inequality leads to others. Thus political inequalities are often responsible for cultural status inequalities; and cultural status

inequalities can be a source of political or socioeconomic inequalities. A good example here is language. The adoption of an official language not only increases the cultural status of the groups associated with that language, but it can also have direct material benefits in terms of, for instance, access to employment in the official sphere.

### **3. Three aspects of cultural status inequality**

In this section, we discuss the three main aspects of cultural status inequality: recognition of religious practices and observances; language and language recognition; and recognition of ethnocultural practices.

#### **3.1 Recognition of religious practices and observances**

Religion and perceived religious insults are particularly potent for group mobilization because of their immense symbolic value for adherents. As already noted, this can take the instrumental form of deliberate ‘insults’ aimed at provoking conflict – “stray pigs at a mosque, a cow’s head in a temple, the alleged kicking of the Quran and Ramayana during religious processions... All are a signal for riot” (Horowitz 2001: p.289). Our concern here, however, is more with the relative status afforded different religions by the state, and its actions, which may be perceived by members of different religious groups as an indication of their group’s cultural status within that society.

In multireligious societies, differing levels of formal recognition or restrictions on the observance of religious practices are often an important source of cultural status inequality. The state’s relationship with religion varies from a total lack of official relationship (complete secularity) to complete integration (theocracy). Theocracies invest political legitimacy in a specific religious framework thus incorporating a strong and formal hierarchy of religious recognition. Even where states are not theocratic, cultural status inequalities in the religious dimension can take extreme forms, including banning particular religions altogether, as with both Jews and Muslims in 15th-century Christian Spain, or the Protestant Huguenots in 16th-century France. More recently, Egypt forbade the rebuilding of Coptic Christian churches in the 1990s.

In less extreme cases, states privilege one religion over others by adopting it as the ‘national religion’, which carries varying degrees of privilege. For example, in Malaysia, Islam is designated the official religion but the constitution guarantees freedom of religion for non-Muslims. Despite this, proselytization of Muslims by non-Muslims is forbidden and, while not technically illegal, official recognition of apostasy for ex-Muslims is in practice virtually impossible. Indonesia is an interesting example of an explicitly non-secular state which however gave official recognition to all major religions in the country under the ‘national ideology’ of Pancasila (Ramage 1995).

Informal practices can also privilege certain religions over others, even when the state is officially neutral and/or secular. For instance, when then-Ivorian President Félix Houphouët-Boigny ordered the construction of a Catholic Basilica in Yamoussoukro in the 1980s for the approximately \$600 million, which he claimed to have paid himself, many Muslims perceived this as a clear indication of Christian supremacy in Côte d’Ivoire (Langer 2005). Indeed, in officially secular states there is often nonetheless bias towards the majority religion. In most secular Western European countries, Christianity retains a privileged public position through, for example, the designation of public holidays and even permitted first names.

Furthermore, the fact that many political parties in secular states around the world have a particular religious affiliation and world view may result in the alienation of other religious groups if these parties gain power. The association between political parties and religion can be either explicit, as with the Christian Democrats (CDU) in Germany, or associative, as with the Republican Party and the Christian Right in the United States.

### **3.2 Language and language recognition**

The privileging of one or a few languages over others often signals, or is at least perceived by minority-language speakers as signalling, the dominance of those for whom these languages are the mother tongue. Moreover, as the UNDP Human Development Report 2004 notes, “[r]ecognizing a language means more than just the use of that language. It symbolizes respect for the people who speak it, their culture and their full inclusion in society” (UNDP 2004: p.9). At one extreme, governments may actively penalize the use of a minority language – a policy particularly associated with colonial governments in Africa, but also pursued by some of their postcolonial successors. An example is Niger, where the Tameshaq language of the Tuareg people was banned from use in public places. Beyond Africa, language restrictions remain in place in some countries, such as Syria, which limits the use of Kurdish. A more common situation is the determination of a ‘national’ or ‘official’ language. Designating a single language as the national language may be seen as a means of promoting a cohesive and overarching ‘national’ identity, but it can also generate resentment among minority-language speakers who may feel symbolically excluded in addition, possibly, to being materially disadvantaged.

Conflicts revolving around language have been notable in India, where a high level of linguistic diversity has created status problems since independence. Indeed, in the period after 1956, the constituent states of the Indian federation were redrawn along explicitly linguistic lines in an attempt to mitigate this problem. Most resentment revolved around the imposition of Hindi as the main national language, which was seen as a form of ‘Hindi imperialism’. Violent protests resulted in a number of places, notably Madras, where the violence has been seen as a product of “the ruling authority's failure to establish communication with the people who had intense feelings concerning the language issue” (Das Gupta 1970: p.240). The assertion of a three-language formula, which guaranteed the continued status of English as a national lingua franca alongside Hindi, undercut much of this tension but language recognition and language issues continue to provoke tensions that have sometimes turned violent in parts of India. For example, in 2005, activists from the United Forum for Safeguarding Manipuri Script and Language (MEELAL, or Meetei Eron Eyek Loinasinlon Apunba Lup) set fire to the state’s Central Library, destroying around 150,000 books, protesting against the use of the Bengali script for their language (Egreteau 2006).

### **3.3 Recognition of ethnocultural practices**

The state’s recognition of, and support for, the cultural practices of different groups is another important aspect of cultural status inequality. Also important in this respect are the ethnocultural practices and customs employed in the functioning of the state itself, which express the ‘identity’ of the state. As already argued, even when states are broadly tolerant of cultural diversity, official practices may privilege the dominant cultural group through, for instance, the incorporation of their cultural identity and practices into the rituals and symbols of governance, national holidays, naming conventions (of buildings, streets, and so on) and promulgation of national ‘heroes’

and histories. Attempts by the state to remain 'neutral' may sometimes be interpreted negatively by minority groups who associate 'neutrality' with de facto dominance of the majority culture. This was arguably the case when the French government introduced a ban on the wearing of any obvious religious symbols in schools and other public spaces, which was widely interpreted by Muslims as an attack on Islamic headscarves rather than a broader secular move. Lack of recognition of different cultural practices by the state can feed into broader informal practices within the society at large – an example is the assimilationist pressure in Guatemala against indigenous school girls wearing indigenous dress. Stereotyping by the media is evidently very important here, as it plays a vital role in '(re)producing' the cultural identity of the state. In Côte d'Ivoire, for instance, some newspapers closely linked to the governing party were and still are instrumental in the promotion of the concept of l'Ivoirité, which was introduced around the time of the 1995 presidential elections to categorise the residents of Côte d'Ivoire into 'real' Ivorians and 'foreigners' (Langer 2005). Although this had immediate political implications for the presidential elections, it also fed into broader processes of cultural stereotyping.

An important factor in many countries concerns the treatment of customary law practices and principles. On the one hand, lack of recognition of customary law practices can generate alienation towards the legal system as a whole among minority groups. Plural legal systems not only increase the access of these minorities to the legal system, but also their overall sense of being culturally valued. In Guatemala, for instance, the 1996 Accord on Indigenous Identity and Rights states that "the lack of knowledge by the national legislative body of the customary norms that regulate indigenous community life as well as the lack of access that the indigenous population has to the resources of the national justice system, have caused negation of rights, discrimination and marginalization" (quoted in Buvollen 2002). In order to overcome this, the Guatemalan government and opposition agreed to implement a range of policies "acknowledging the distinct cultures of indigenous peoples in Guatemala", such as free interpretation services into indigenous languages for judicial proceedings, cultural sensitivity programmes for judiciary members and recognition of indigenous communities' judicial norms (UNDP 2004: p.59). At times, customary or religious legal systems may conflict with the underlying foundations of the civil legal code. Conflicts that emerge from such incompatibilities are often at the heart of the cultural status debate within multicultural and multireligious countries. The emergence of civil unrest and severe tensions and occasionally serious violent clashes between Christians and Muslims after 12 of Nigeria's 36 states decided to adopt Sharia law in the period 2000-2002, clearly points towards the divisiveness of these issues.

Beyond customary law, denigration or suppression of other cultural practices and appearances associated with particular ethnic groups are also important aspects of cultural status inequality and can contribute to grievances and group mobilization around these issues. This was the case in the southern Malay provinces of Thailand which rebelled against the ethnic Thai government in the 1940s. In 1932, the Thai government tried to integrate its Malay citizens into the mainstream Thai body politic through educational inculcation, including the teaching of the Thai language and Thai history. These moves "had little success but also aroused little opposition" (Forbes 1982: p.1059). After 1938, however, the government stance became more aggressively assimilatory rather than integrationist, including measures discriminating against the Malay language and the abrogation of Sharia laws. More potent than these policies, however, were explicitly cultural restrictions on Malay practices. As Forbes (1982: 1059) describes:

“... sarongs [traditional Malay dress] were banned and the wearing of western style long trousers and topees was made compulsory for all men. The chewing of betel and areca nuts was prohibited, and it was even stipulated that loads should be carried on the shoulder (Thai fashion) rather than on the head (Malay fashion)...[These measures] contributed substantially to the emergence of a Malay separatist movement.”

Table 1 summarizes important elements within each of the three main aspects of cultural status inequality. Understanding differential treatment, policies and practices across these elements and aspects is necessary to gain a complete picture of a country's cultural status inequalities. The list is indicative rather than exhaustive and it is important to emphasize that state and social practices relating to these different elements may take the form of formal policies, informal policies and practices, or symbolic gestures. Clearly, not all elements will be relevant in all contexts. Further, it is important to note that in some cases, the prohibition of particular cultural customs, the implementation of restrictions on some cultural groups' practices, or even the special treatment of certain cultural groups in the legal sphere, might be considered as indications of the state's promotion of cultural status equality rather than status inequality and exclusion. Examples are the prohibition on Orange Marches passing through certain Catholic neighbourhoods in Northern Ireland, restrictions on the use of English in Quebec, or the exemption of Sikhs from wearing motorcycle helmets in various Western countries. In addition to understanding cultural status inequalities as practised by the state, the media plays a vital role in representing, and to some extent shaping, cultural status inequalities and is thus also an important area for research and policy. This all points to the need for these issues to be analysed and studied in a country-specific context.

**Table 1. Dimensions of cultural status inequality**

<b>Recognition of religion and religious observances</b>	<b>Language and language recognition</b>	<b>Recognition of ethnocultural practices</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State religion and religious 'identity' of the state</li> <li>• State support for different religions</li> <li>• Religious freedoms and rights</li> <li>• Religious schooling</li> <li>• Religious legal systems</li> <li>• Recognition of religious holidays and festivals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Official and national languages</li> <li>• Policies towards vernacular education</li> <li>• Provisions for vernacular broadcast media</li> <li>• Support for vernacular language study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ethnic rituals and symbols of governance</li> <li>• Recognition of customary law practices and principles</li> <li>• Dress and appearance</li> <li>• Recognition of multicultural histories in educational curricula</li> <li>• Promotion of national 'heroes' and festivals</li> <li>• State recognition of ethnic holidays and festivals</li> <li>• Recognition of customary leadership (for example, chieftans)</li> </ul>

#### **4. Status anxiety: Linking cultural status inequalities, mobilization and conflict**

There are two ways in which cultural status inequalities are an important source of group mobilization and potentially violent conflict. Firstly, cultural status inequalities are often in themselves an important cause of group grievances. If the state attributes inferior status to certain cultural identities, members of these cultural groups are more likely to feel alienated from the state and to mobilize along cultural lines in order to improve their group's cultural status. For instance, in Côte d'Ivoire, while the political exclusion and relative socioeconomic deprivation of the northern ethnic groups were both essential factors contributing to the emergence of the violent conflict there, perceptions of non-recognition and secondary status of the Muslim religion, predominant in the northern regions, (including the construction of the Catholic Basilica mentioned above) also played an important role in fostering northern group grievances and the subsequent outbreak of rebellion (Langer 2005).

Secondly, cultural status inequalities can play an important role in affecting the political salience of other dimensions of horizontal inequality (political and socioeconomic). While severe socioeconomic horizontal inequalities can persist for decades without raising violent responses, changes in cultural status inequalities, like changes in political HIs, can be important in the politicization of inequalities, and can be a factor in group mobilization for violence. Where socioeconomic inequalities combine with state policies that appear to privilege one set of cultural norms and practices above others, group mobilization along cultural lines becomes more likely. The simultaneous presence of severe cultural status inequalities alongside political and socioeconomic horizontal inequalities represents a particularly explosive situation, because in such a context the excluded political elites not only have strong incentives to mobilise their supporters for violent conflict along cultural lines, but are also likely to gain support among the cultural constituencies relatively easily (Langer 2007).

Cultural status inequalities are particularly potent for group mobilization because of their inherent link to group identity. As John Sidel notes in his study of religious violence in Indonesia, identity is "inherently incomplete, unstable, and interactive... at the core of any identity is always a constitutive sense of lack, of inadequacy" (Sidel 2006: p.13, emphasis added). Such anxieties are important for violent group mobilization because they are an important determinant of the political salience of group differentials.

Linked to this latter example is the particular potency of incidents involving cultural status inequalities in triggering violent conflict. Symbolic events which reinforce or publicly 'perform' cultural status inequalities have an important role in triggering group violence. In some cases, this may be deliberate and cynical provocation. In other cases, ongoing contestation over cultural status can be heightened around regularly reoccurring events, such as the Orange Marches in Northern Ireland, which find their origins in celebrations of Protestant conquests over Catholic Ireland. In such circumstances, the state's response towards these contestations – for instance, whether to allow or disallow marching through Catholic areas – can affect different groups' perceptions of their respective cultural status. These cases are all the more problematic and difficult to resolve where they become embedded in the cultural practices of the groups involved. Even where direct or institutionalized 'provocation' is not present, contingent events that reveal the extent of cultural status inequalities may provoke (violent) group mobilization.

As we noted above, cultural status inequalities are an important influence in determining the political salience of socioeconomic and political horizontal

inequalities. As mobilizing agents in themselves, cultural status inequalities have direct resonance with people, and do not necessarily need to be 'interpreted' by leaders. Indeed, mobilization for apparently acultural motives is often given additional force when movement leaders adopt an explicitly cultural interpretive frame. Thus, for instance, Brown's (2004) analysis of the environmentalist movement in Malaysia found that agitation against environmentally damaging projects in the 1980s generated little in the way of social mobilization, except where activists portrayed the issue as one of cultural status inequality. Environmentalist activists admitted that the successful mobilization of thousands of protestors against a proposed nuclear waste dump in the town Papan drew most of its force from their ability to draw on ethnic discontent – in particular the fact that the proposed site of the dump had apparently been relocated to Papan, a predominantly Chinese town, from another nearby Malay-dominated town. In contrast, other environmental protests in Malaysia aroused little mass support; what mobilized protestors in the Papan case was the Malay-dominated government's apparent Not In My (Ethnic) Backyard stance – in other words, the perception of cultural status inequalities. The point here is that the relationship between cultural status inequalities and (violent) group mobilization can be more direct than with other forms of horizontal inequality because of the inherently cultural dimension of the grievances involved.

## 5. Conclusions

In this paper, we have argued that differential treatment and recognition of different groups' cultural practices and norms by the state constitute cultural status inequalities. While we do not contest the importance of political and socioeconomic grievances as drivers of (violent) group mobilization, we have argued that group grievances can also emerge out of the inferior treatment or status afforded different groups' cultural practices by the state. Moreover, we have argued that the most dangerous situations exist where all three dimensions of horizontal inequality – socioeconomic, political and cultural status – run in the same direction, or are consistent.

In order to assess the extent of a country's cultural status inequalities, we have categorized differential treatment in policies and practices – formal, informal, and symbolic – into three elements: religion and religious observation; language and language recognition; and recognition of ethnocultural practices.

Cultural status inequalities are particularly prone to group mobilization, and potentially violence, because of the inherent link with group identity. This can take the form both of 'entrepreneurial' mobilization by self-interested elites or grievance-based mobilization on the part of disadvantaged groups. Many scholars, for instance, see the 'language conflicts' of India as instrumental, being exploited by disaffected elites (e.g. Brass 1974). Yet this does not mean that there are not 'genuine' group grievances about cultural status underlying such instrumental mobilization. Indeed, it is our contention that instrumental mobilization often draws upon issues of cultural status precisely because of the degree to which they matter to the wider population. Where groups feel their identity is accorded insufficient recognition, they are more likely to become alienated from that state and to resort to mobilization, which could turn violent.

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